

Chapter 16

Passage of Lines

The principal task involved in a passage of lines is the preparation for continuing the attack.

FM 1005, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 22 May 1941

Passage of lines is a tactical enabling operation in which one unit moves through another unit's positions with the intent of moving into or out of enemy contact. A commander conducts a passage of lines to continue an attack or conduct a counterattack, retrograde security or main battle forces, and anytime one unit cannot bypass another unit's position. The conduct of a passage of lines potentially involves close combat. It involves transferring the responsibility for an area of operations (AO) between two commanders. That transfer of responsibility usually occurs when roughly two-thirds of the passing force has moved through the passage point. If not directed by higher authority, the unit commanders determine—by mutual agreement—the time to pass command. They disseminate this information to the lowest levels of both organizations.

16-1. The commander's reasons for conducting a passage of lines are to—

- Sustain the tempo of an offensive operation.
- Maintain the viability of the defense by transferring responsibility from one unit to another.
- Transition from a delay or security operation by one force to a defense.
- Free a unit for another mission or task.

The headquarters directing the passage of lines is responsible for determining when the passage starts and finishes.

16-2. A passage of lines occurs under two basic conditions. A **forward passage of lines** occurs when a unit passes through another unit's positions while moving toward the enemy. A **rearward passage of lines** occurs when a unit passes through another unit's positions while

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moving away from the enemy. Ideally, a passage of lines does not interfere with conducting the stationary unit's operations.

ORGANIZATION OF FORCES

16-3. A unit may participate in a passage of lines as either the passing or stationary force. Except for co-locating command posts and providing for guides by the stationary force, conducting a passage of lines does not require a special task organization. Both the passing force and the stationary force maintain their previous combat organization during the passage. Usually, if the stationary unit has the capability, it is responsible for conducting operations against uncommitted enemy forces. However, operations directed against uncommitted enemy forces may be the responsibility of a higher echelon, depending on the echelon at which the passage takes place.

16-4. A forward passing unit's order of march is generally reconnaissance and security elements first. The ground combat force move next, followed by combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) units. The commander integrates his artillery, air defense, and engineers into the order of march in accordance with the factors of METTTC. The passing unit reverses this order of march in a rearward passage of lines. The stationary unit normally provides the moving unit with guides to expedite the passage. Attack helicopters and air cavalry are useful in providing security.

CONTROL MEASURES

16-5. Control measures associated with a passage of lines are generally restrictive to prevent fratricide. As a minimum, they include the AO, assembly areas (AAs), attack positions, battle handover line (BHL), contact points, passage points, passage lanes, routes, gaps, phase lines, and recognition signals. The headquarters directing the passage designates or recommends contact points, passage lanes, AAs, routes, and start and end times for the passage. The commander may also use start points, release points, fire support coordinating measures, such as coordinated fire lines (CFLs), and other control measures as necessary to conduct this task. (See [Figure 16-1](#), page 16-2.) Unless the higher headquarters of the two units establishes the necessary graphic control measures, the stationary unit establishes them for the passage. However, the stationary unit commander must coordinate them with the passing unit commander. The stationary unit establishes these measures because it owns the terrain, it knows where the obstacles are, and it knows the tactical plan. If the control measures dictated by the higher headquarters are not sufficient—because they do not contain enough passage points, lanes, and so forth—the two units can agree to add the necessary measures.

16-6. A **passage point** is a specifically designated place where the passing units pass through the stationary unit. The location of this point is where the commander wants subordinate units to physically execute a passage of lines. In a forward passage of lines, the passage point marks the location where the passing unit is no longer bound by the restrictions placed on it by the stationary force. On the other hand, in a rearward passage of lines, the passage point marks the location where the stationary unit can restrict the movement and maneuver of the passing force. Between the contact

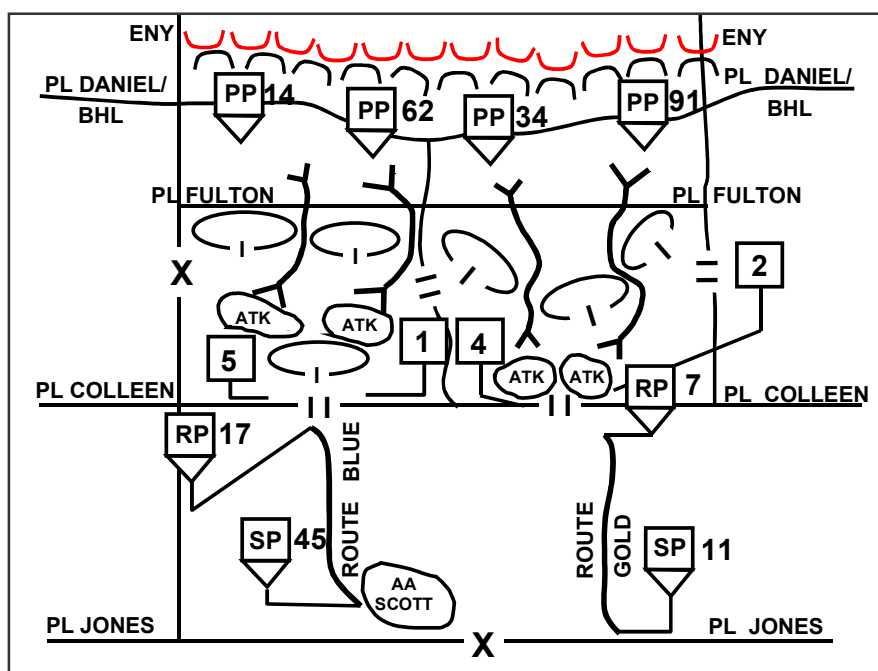


Figure 16-1. Control Measures Associated with a Forward Passage of Lines

point and the passage point, the stationary unit controls the passing force's movement. Figure 16-2 depicts the graphic control measure for passage point 8.

16-7. A **passage lane** is a lane through an enemy or friendly obstacle that provides safe passage for a passing force. The lane may be cleared, including being reduced and proofed, as part of a breach operation, or it may be included as part of the design of a friendly obstacle. It is a clear route all the way through an obstacle. Passage lanes normally end where a route begins. That route should allow the passing unit to move rapidly through the stationary unit's area. Figure 16-3 depicts the graphic control measure for a lane.

16-8. A **gap** is an area free of armed mines or obstacles whose width and direction allow a friendly force to pass through the area containing obstacles while dispersed in a tactical formation. The presence of gaps prevents inadvertent concentrations of soldiers and equipment around the entry points of lanes. Figure 16-4 depicts the graphic control measure for a gap.

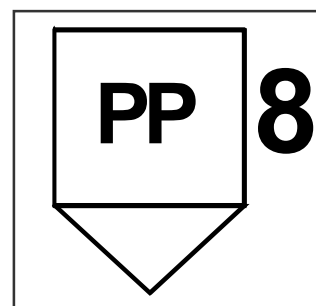


Figure 16-2.
Passage Point 8

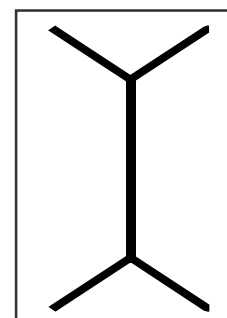


Figure 16-3. Lane

PLANNING A PASSAGE OF LINES

16-9. As with any activity involving transferring combat responsibility from one unit to another, the complex nature of a passage of lines involves risk. As with other operations, a passage of lines may be categorized as deliberate or hasty. During a passage of lines, the commander normally maintains the established tempo. Sustaining that established tempo requires detailed planning and preparations for a deliberate passage of lines. In this case, both the stationary and moving force have time to—

- Publish written orders.
- Exchange plans, intelligence information, databases, and liaison personnel.
- Conduct briefings and detailed reconnaissance.
- Conduct rehearsals.

The commander uses oral and fragmentary orders to conduct a hasty passage of lines.

16-10. In a passage of lines, the headquarters directing the passage is responsible for designating—

- Subsequent missions for both forces.
- When and under what conditions passage of command takes place.
- Start and finish times for the passage.
- Contact points between the units involved.
- Common maneuver control measures and graphics.

The directing headquarters normally establishes this information in either the warning order or the order directing the passage. In the absence of higher-echelon guidance, close coordination and understanding between the commanders and staffs of the two units are essential to a smooth passage.

16-11. The unit commanders plan the passage of lines to maintain enemy contact and provide constant fires on the enemy. Commanders reduce risk and ensure synchronization through detailed planning and decentralized execution. With forces intermingling during the passage, the need for positive control increases. The passage requires close coordination, clearly understood control measures, liaison between all headquarters and echelons involved in the passage, and clear identification of the moment or event that causes one force to assume responsibility for the AO from another.

16-12. After receiving the warning order that directs a passage of lines, the passing unit's commander and key staff representatives generally co-locate with the command post of the stationary unit to facilitate in planning the passage and establishing common situational understanding. If the passing unit cannot co-locate one of its command posts to help plan the passage, it conducts extensive liaison with the stationary unit. The planning focus for both the passing unit and the stationary unit is on operations following the passage. While this occurs, the two units involved coordinate the following:

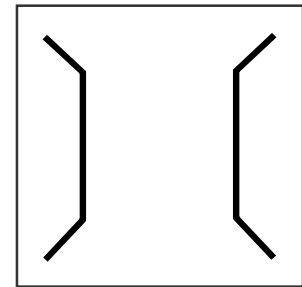


Figure 16-4. Gap

- The exchange of intelligence and combat information.
- Current friendly dispositions and tactical plans, especially deception and obstacle plans.
- Direct and indirect fires and close air support plans.
- Any necessary maneuver control measures and graphics not directed by the higher headquarters, such as boundary changes, the BHL, emergency CSS points, and AA and firing positions for artillery, air defense, and other units.
- Long-range and short-range recognition symbols and vehicle markings to reduce the probability of fratricide.
- When and under what conditions control of the AO transfers from one headquarters to the other, if not previously established.
- Provisions for movement control, including contact points, start and release points, primary and alternate routes, route selection, priorities for using routes and facilities, passage points, and provision for guides.
- Reconnaissance by elements of the passing unit.
- Signal operating instruction details, such as call signs, frequencies, and recognition signals.
- Security measures during the passage, including nuclear, biological, and chemical reconnaissance or biological detection systems.
- Fires, obscurants, and any other combat, CS, and CSS provided by the stationary unit.
- Measures to reduce both units' vulnerability to attack by enemy weapons of mass destruction.
- Operations security measures required before or during the passage.
- Allocation of terrain for use by the passing force.
- Air defense cover—up to and forward of the BHL.
- Logistics support for the passing unit provided by the stationary unit, especially fuel, maintenance, and medical treatment.

16-13. The fire support elements of both the stationary and the passing unit must agree on allocating firing positions. The AO commander controls the allocation of firing positions in case of disagreement. These positions must be far enough forward to support the operation without having to redeploy during critical stages of the battle. The fire support elements normally position in areas not identified by the enemy.

16-14. Detailed air defense planning is essential for a passage of lines. Moving units tend to move slowly and often in some type of column formation during the passage. Vehicle congestion presents lucrative targets to enemy aircraft. In most cases, the stationary air defense elements can protect the passing force, allowing the air defense units supporting the passing force to move with the passing force. Dissemination of early warning and Army airspace command and control information reduces the risk of fratricide to friendly aviation assets while increasing the probability of the timely detection of enemy air. Strict adherence to identification, friend-or-foe (IFF)

procedures among pilots and air defense fire units is critical, especially during periods of limited visibility. Local air superiority also reduces the vulnerability of the two forces when congestion cannot be avoided on the ground.

16-15. Once a passage of lines begins, it occurs quickly. Where possible, the operation takes place when the enemy has the least capability to detect it, such as at night or during periods of reduced visibility. In any passage of lines, the commander considers using smoke to screen friendly movement, even at night.

16-16. The passing unit prefers to conduct the passage through a gap in the stationary unit's positions rather than through a lane or a route that traverses those positions. This reduces the vulnerability that results from concentrating forces when one unit passes directly through the occupied positions of another unit. It also avoids the danger of concentrating the passing unit into passage lanes.

16-17. In a forward passage of lines, when there are no gaps through the stationary unit's positions, each battalion task force normally needs at least two passage lanes. In a rearward passage of lines, each battalion needs at least one passage lane. In both cases, a brigade needs at least one additional lane for its tactical vehicles. The routes and lanes provide cover, concealment, and rapid movement of the passing force. The commander may designate alternative routes and lanes for elements of the moving force that are contaminated. They should not disrupt the combat capability of the stationary unit. The commander seeks additional lanes to speed the process if the terrain and enemy situation allow.

16-18. The passing unit normally has priority of route use to and within the stationary unit's AO. Clearing and maintaining passage routes up to the BHL are the responsibility of the stationary force. The stationary force must provide an obstacle overlay of its obstacles. The passing unit must be prepared to help maintain these routes, and it positions its engineer equipment accordingly. The stationary unit is responsible for traffic control within its AO until the passing unit assumes control. During the passage, the passing unit augments the traffic-control capability of the stationary unit as required.

16-19. Based on the commander's concept and intent, the passing force focuses its planning effort on two general areas: coordination with the stationary force and guidance to subordinate units conducting the passage. These planning efforts occur simultaneously. If the enemy attacks during the passage, the plan probably requires modification to prevent hampering friendly maneuver.

16-20. Executing a passage of lines successfully requires effective communication between the two units. The commanders build redundancy of communication signals and means into their passage plans, such as using mobile subscriber equipment and combat net radios. The commanders also designate contact points to ensure effective communication between the two forces at the lowest tactical level.

FORWARD PASSAGE OF LINES

16-21. The purpose of a forward passage of lines is to move forces forward to conduct operations. It ensures the maintenance of enemy contact while allowing the relief of previously committed forces. The stationary force must control and secure the AO far enough to its front that the moving force can pass through the stationary force and reform into a combat formation prior to contact with an enemy force. Generally, the stationary unit supports the passing unit until the passing unit masks the stationary unit's direct fires. The stationary unit continues to support the passing force with its fire support systems until the passing unit moves beyond the supporting range of the stationary force. The stationary unit is also responsible for the security of the line of departure of the forward passing unit until it is able to assume that responsibility. The boundaries of the forward passing force after it completes its passage do not have to coincide with the boundaries of the stationary force. (See Figure 16-5.)

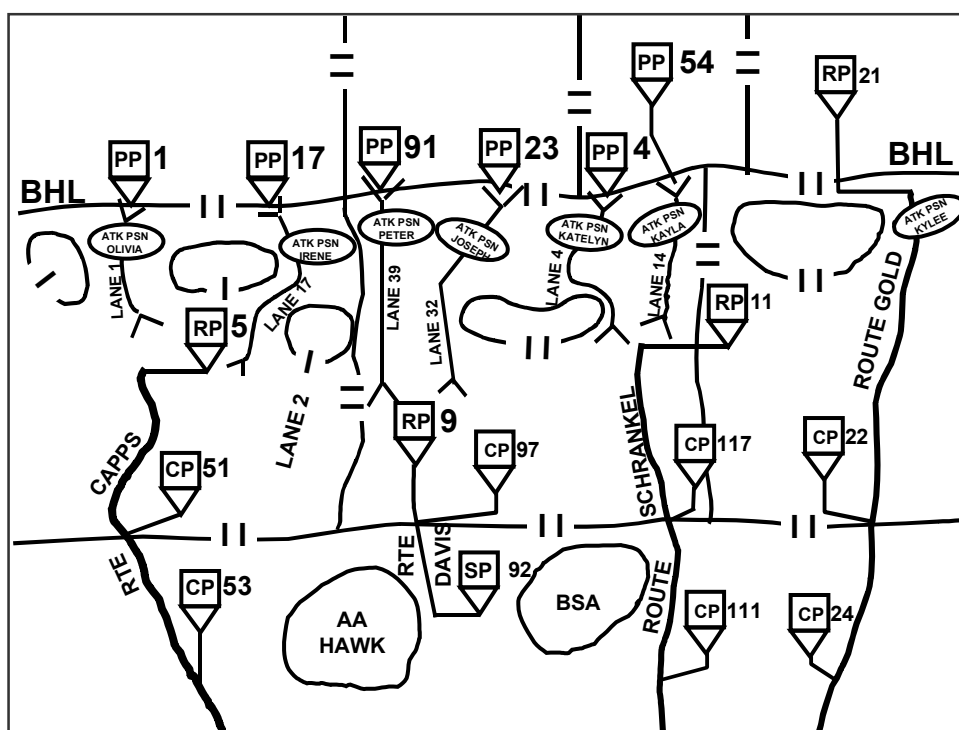


Figure 16-5. Forward Passage of Lines

PREPARING A FORWARD PASSAGE

16-22. The passing unit conducts reconnaissance from its current location to its designated AAs, which are generally located to the rear of the stationary unit. After completing its reconnaissance, the passing unit occupies these AAs.

16-23. The commander should organize the passing force for its subsequent mission before initiating the forward passage of lines. The passing force avoids regrouping in forward AAs or attack positions.

EXECUTING A FORWARD PASSAGE

16-24. When the passing force moves forward, it should move without a halt through the stationary unit while deployed in a combat formation. That minimizes the time the two forces are concentrated in the forward area, making them less vulnerable to enemy attack.

16-25. Support by the stationary force ends when the combat elements of the moving force, including the reserve, have moved beyond direct-fire range. However, artillery, air defense, and other long-range systems may remain to support the passing unit until a previously designated event occurs or a higher headquarters directs another mission.

16-26. When executing the forward passage, the passing unit's reconnaissance elements operate forward of the release points and establish a screen in front of the passing unit. The stationary unit continues to conduct aggressive security operations throughout the passage of lines. The movement of main body forces begins from their AAs to attack positions, where the passing unit conducts its final preparations for the passage of lines and the attack. The passing unit moves to and occupies attack positions when observation by the enemy is unlikely. The stationary unit clears any obstacles from designated passage gaps, lanes, or routes, and guides elements of the passing unit from the contact point through the passage points.

16-27. The direct and indirect-fire assets of the stationary unit normally support the movement of the passing unit. Offensive information operations—especially electronic attack—directed against enemy command and control (C2) nodes disrupt his dissemination of information and his reaction to friendly operations. Any preparatory or covering fires should coincide with the passing unit's movement from the attack position to the passage lanes. After the forward moving unit commander assumes responsibility for the AO, he coordinates all fire support. Depending on the situation at the time, the passing commander may continue to use only the fire support assets of the stationary force until the passage of lines is complete. This allows the passing unit's fire support assets to move forward, in the case of artillery, or remain available to support the passing unit's forward movement, in the case of attack helicopters and close air support. On passage of command, the passing commander also assumes control of fires forward of the BHL. For example, he moves the CFL forward to conform to the movement of his forward security elements.

16-28. The superior headquarters of the forces involved should exercise overall C2 of the passage. In a forward passage, the commander of the passing force normally assumes responsibility for conducting operations beyond the BHL once the attack begins. In practice, however, it is useful to complete the transfer of responsibility, including fire support, just before starting the operation. During the passage, two parallel chains of command are operating in one area simultaneously, and the possibility of confusion exists. A successful passage of lines requires clear C2 responsibilities. The passing unit's command post passes through the lines as soon as possible after the lead elements complete their passage and locates where it can best control operations.

16-29. The stationary unit furnishes the passing unit with any previously coordinated or emergency logistics assistance within its capabilities. These typically include—

- Evacuating casualties and enemy prisoners of war.
- Controlling dislocated civilians.
- Using areas and facilities such as water points and medical facilities.
- Controlling routes and traffic management.
- Recovering disabled vehicles and equipment.

The passing force normally assumes full responsibility for its CSS support forward of the BHL.

16-30. When dissimilar units, such as light infantry and mounted forces, are involved in a passage of lines, the principles involved are the same; however, the execution is different. For example, the type and amount of support provided by the stationary unit will change. In some cases, the higher headquarters ordering the passage needs to provide assets to support the passage.

REARWARD PASSAGE OF LINES

16-31. A rearward passage of lines is similar in concept to a forward passage of lines. It continues the defense or retrograde operation, maintaining enemy contact while allowing for recovery of security or other forward forces. This operation may or may not be conducted under enemy pressure. Counterintelligence analysis provides an assessment of enemy collection against friendly forces, specified by gaps and vulnerabilities, and countermeasures to enemy collection. Additionally, that analysis provides the commander with a view into the enemy's decision making and intelligence cycles and the time period in which the enemy may discover the movement.

PLANNING A REARWARD PASSAGE

16-32. Planning procedures for a rearward passage of lines closely resemble the planning procedures for a forward passage of lines. However, rearward movement is likely to be more difficult because of the following:

- The enemy probably has the initiative, which tends to reduce the time available to conduct liaison and reconnaissance and make detailed plans.
- If the rearward moving force has been in action, its soldiers are tired and possibly disorganized to some degree.
- The enemy may be applying pressure on the passing force.
- Friendly forces may be more difficult to recognize because enemy forces may be intermixed with them.

16-33. Close coordination between the two commanders is crucial to successfully executing the rearward passage and subsequent transfer of responsibility. This requirement for close coordination is even more critical when the tactical situation results in a staggered or incremental rearward passage across an AO. The passing commander relinquishes control of his elements remaining in contact at the time of the transfer of responsibility to the stationary commander. Generally, the stationary unit assumes control of the AO

forward of the BHL after twothirds of the passing force's combat elements move through the passage points.

16-34. After receiving the warning order, the passing unit begins coordination and establishes communication with the stationary unit. The commanders of these units coordinate the same details as those outlined for a forward passage of lines. For example, the stationary commander coordinates for fires to support the rearward passing force. The two staffs coordinate those control measures necessary to support retrograde operations and their associated rearward passage of lines. (See paragraphs 16-5 to 16-8.) The commanders establish a probable time to initiate passage. The stationary commander assigns responsibility for closing and executing obstacles.

16-35. The stationary unit identifies multiple routes through its AO and across its rear boundary to AAs. The passing unit begins reconnaissance of these routes as soon as possible. The stationary unit must physically show all obstacles and routes and gaps through them to the passing unit. It provides guides for the passing unit—especially through obstacles—and mans contact points and passage points. The passing unit begins to reconnoiter its routes to the established contact points with the stationary unit's troops. The stationary unit establishes a security area in which responsibility transitions from the moving force to the stationary force. Normally, a BHL designates the forward edge of this area. The BHL is within direct-fire range and observed indirect-fire range of the stationary force.

PREPARING A REARWARD PASSAGE

16-36. The command posts of both units involved should move to a position where they can co-locate as part of the preparations for the rearward passage. This co-location reduces the risk associated with a passage because it makes it easier to coordinate between the two units. If circumstances prevent the units' command posts from co-locating, they must exchange liaison teams to ensure thorough coordination. If necessary, fire support assets from the stationary force occupy positions forward of their primary positions to give maximum coverage of forces of rearward moving unit.

EXECUTING A REARWARD PASSAGE

16-37. The passing unit maintains command of its subordinate elements throughout the retrograde and rearward passage. The normal order of march in a rearward passage of lines is CSS elements, main command post, CS elements, tactical command post, and combat units. The passage point marks the location where the passing unit comes under the control of restrictions placed by the stationary unit. (See [Figure 16-6](#).) Note that the unit on the far right does not have a passage point because of the gap existing at that location. If the enemy continues to press his attack during the passage, the passing unit controls the battle from co-located command posts while the stationary unit monitors and controls the passage of lines until battle handover occurs. The passing unit's command post passes through the lines as soon as possible after the lead elements complete their passage. On passage of command, the stationary unit assumes the defense of the AO.

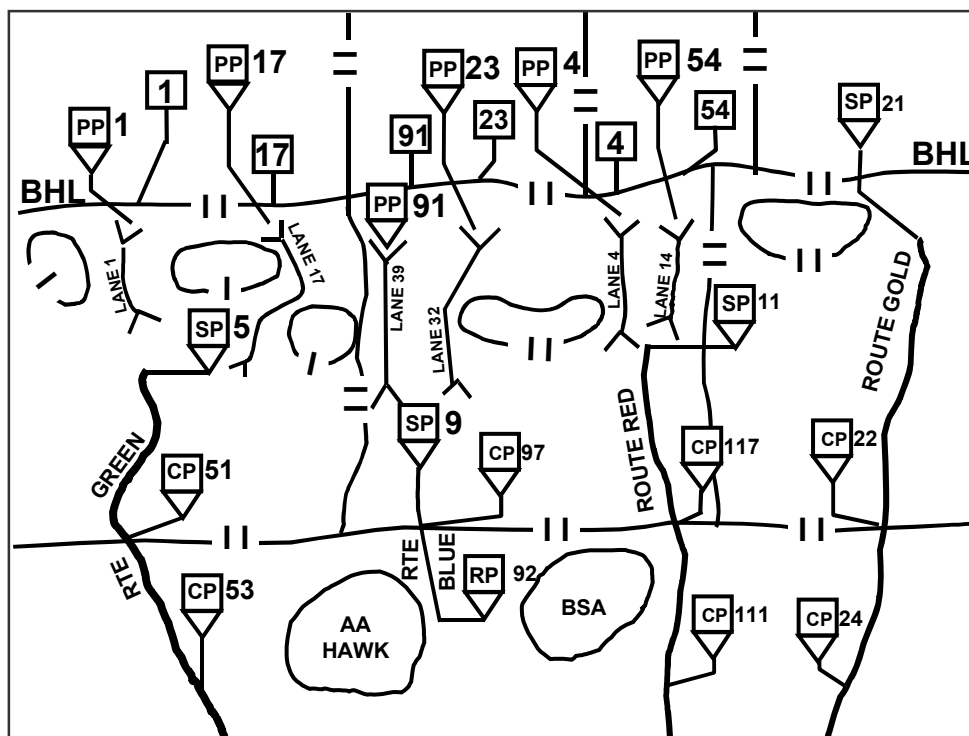


Figure 16-6. Rearward Passage of Lines

16-38. The stationary unit provides the passing unit with as much assistance as possible. Pivotal to the success of the rearward passage of lines is providing indirect and direct fire support by the stationary unit to the passing unit. This is especially important in covering the withdrawal of elements left in contact during a delay. The stationary unit's fire support assets answer calls for fire from the passing unit until battle handover occurs. The passing unit's fire support assets echelon rearward to provide continuous fire support for the passing unit until it successfully disengages. Once the passing unit hands over control of the battle to the stationary unit, the stationary unit initiates and clears calls for all fires forward of its location. The same procedure applies to the dedicated air defense assets of the passing and stationary units.

16-39. The stationary unit's engineer assets provide support to prepare the defense and execute the passage. Priority of effort initially ensures that the passing unit is able to move through passage lanes around the stationary unit's defensive positions. It shifts to close these passage lanes once the passing unit and any security elements disengage and withdraw through the security area and obstacles.

16-40. The stationary unit provides the passing unit with the previously coordinated CSS as far forward as possible. The stationary unit concentrates on providing the passing unit with emergency medical, recovery, and fuel supplies to enable the passing unit to rapidly move through the stationary unit's positions.